

June 5, 2023

VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT

Victim: H ■■■ E ■■■
USAO Number: 2022R00121
Court Docket Number: 22-CR-00449

Your Honor,

The impact of Robert Merkle's actions have been extensive for me and my family. Merkle harassed my older sister, A ■■■ E ■■■, with hostile emails and text messages from March of 2017 until he was first sent to prison later that year. Although A ■■■'s case is not included under the Computer Crime currently charged against him, it has direct bearing on Merkle's harassment of me years later. It also clearly demonstrates the prior and persistent nature of his offenses. For this reason, I am including A ■■■'s impact statement as an addition to mine. I am also including the impact statement of our mother, identified as K in these documents. Her support has been consequential for us through this ordeal and her account should be recognized.

Before July of 2021 all I knew about Robert Merkle was from A ■■■'s disturbing experience and what had been reported in the news. When I began receiving suspicious text messages from an unknown number, asking for A ■■■'s contact information, common sense told me that it was him. Merkle attempted to use me to reconnect with a former victim. When it became clear that was not going to happen, the messages became aggressive and threatening towards me. This harassment continued until I deactivated my phone number the following September.

The initial impact was a fearful race against time. Since Merkle was on parole with little oversight, I was acutely aware of how easily he could travel to my area if he should find out where I lived. What would happen in October, when the parole ended and Merkle was entirely free from any regulation? I filed a report with my local police department and then one with the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. I contacted a lawyer and was told that an order of protection wouldn't likely deter a serial stalker like Merkle. Even attending a court hearing for an order of protection was risky, as it could intensify his fixation. I purchased a new phone line and shut down my social media accounts. I called my friends to warn them in case they, too, began to receive suspicious messages. I contacted my supervisor at work and requested they warn my coworkers as well.

Over the long-term, the misery only continued. I enrolled in a self-defense class and kept constant vigilance whenever I went outside the home. For months I requested my local police department to keep a regular cycle of increased patrol in my neighborhood. I never felt like I was completely safe, or that my family and friends were safe. It is a petrifying weight on the mind—to know that others, especially your loved ones, can be at risk just for knowing you.

The only thing that alleviated this fear was learning of Merkle's arrest in January of 2022. Today, I am still extremely hesitant to share any personal information about myself to others. I intend to eventually move from the Missouri/Illinois area to have a more significant physical distance from Merkle upon his release. Still, because of what A ■■■ and I have experienced, I'm resigned to the reality that Merkle will use the Internet to try to contact me as soon as he's out of prison. That is why I request that Robert Merkle be given the maximum prison sentence for his crimes and is given absolutely no Internet access.

Thank you,

H ■■■ E ■■■